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Self-regulation and Personality

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Abstract

This paper introduces the differential approach to study human psychic self-regulation. Theoretical frame and studies of relation between individual differences of self-regulation and personality are described. According to this approach, self-regulation is understood as a system process of conscious voluntary activity that assures goal setting and corresponding to these goals achievement.

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1. Introduction

Over the last decades the problem of psychic self-regulation has attracted the attention of an increasing number of researchers and practical psychologists.

The subject of psychology of self-regulation are integrative psychic processes, which provides self-organization of psychic activity of the individuality as an active subject of person's actions, behavior, life-being, as well as the integrity of human individuality. The main tendency of self-regulation research in Russian psychology is the shift from researching functions and the structure of self-regulation and its traits to researching development and individual peculiarities of self-regulation and its personal determinants [1], [2].

The problem of conscious self-regulation takes the central place in the context of individual development and existence. Goal-oriented regulation of individual's activity is the main mechanism providing productive relationships between the subjective, objective and social reality. When speaking of a person who accepts the aims of his operative actions and achieves them by using available and acceptable methods, we can talk of a conscious self-regulation. The foundations of psychology of self-regulation as a scientific field in Russia based on the ideas of famous Russian psychologists Anokhin, Bernstein, Oshanin and Nebylitsyn.

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It is typical for classical psychology to study the structure of self-regulation on the basis of physiology and psychophysiology and as a component of different kinds of practical and psychic activities. In the frame of non-classical paradigm, we suppose that psychic self-regulation, as compared to physiological levels of individuality, has its specific features, and principles of cybernetic and synergetic can be applied to the analysis of psyche only as a metaphor.

In the 21st century, the post-non-classical paradigm has won the leading place in Russian psychology. Its main distinctive feature is the inclusion of multiple paradigms, creation of integrated concepts of psyche and an increased interest in the development of self-regulation and self-organization. The focus has shifted towards the investigation of conscious self-regulation in the establishment of human individuality.

In our understanding, regulation is a process of conscious self-organization of psychic activity that assures goal setting and achievement of results corresponding to these goals. The regulation is realized through a wholesome multi-level system, which has a certain structure of interrelated components. A conceptual model of conscious self-regulation system developed by O. Konopkin includes the main functional components: goal of the activity (as it is understood and accepted by subject); subjective model of activity conditions significant for the achievement of the goal; program of the activity; system of criteria of success of goal achievement; evaluation and corrections of results of the activity [3].

Conceptual ideas of self-regulation model were initially elaborated and experimentally tested in the field of human senso-motor activity, later they were successfully applied to the analysis of regulation within the domains of educational, professional, and sport activity.

The main mechanisms of self-regulation were revealed and it was proved that success in various kinds of activity is enabled by the formed integrated self-regulation system. A lack of development of any structural-functional component can seriously limit the effectiveness of actions in all kinds of activity.

In other words, no matter how cognitively talented and competent an individual is, the high effectiveness of his activity is always guided by the mature and complete system of conscious self-regulation of the achievement of external practical and internal goals. These goals can be directed either towards oneself or towards resolution of personal developmental problems.

Presently voluntary conscious self-regulation can be understood as a multilevel system process of psychic activity that influences the management of goal setting and goal attainment. At the same time the term consciousness only means that the individual could in principle become aware of psychic self-regulation, as in case of some difficulties or conscious construction of new plans and behavioral programs. And this conscious aspect of self-regulation is connected to specific features of human psyche.

Over the past years, in the laboratory of self-regulation of Psychological institute of Russian academy of education we have been studying individual differences in conscious self-regulation across various types of activity – operator's, athlete's and scholar's. We have defined, described, and systematically analyzed the phenomenon of individual differences in self-regulation, which manifests itself in the way that people differ in the developmental level of conscious self-regulation, plan their activity goals and model the conditions of their achievement, apply different ways and algorithms to complete their actions, have different success criteria to evaluate the results [4].

When focusing on individuality as a subject of various kinds of activity, we investigate psychic self-regulation, which is a functional mean of the subject and a psychological mechanism enabling him or her to mobilize personality and cognitive recourses to complete the activity, to set and achieve its goals. The concept of subject emphasizes the active creative nature of the human, his ability to set and achieve subjectively accepted goals.

In contrast to the subject's characteristics, personality structures determine not the way the goals are set and achieved, but what types of goals are set, what motivates people and what their attitude to the world around them is.

Some of the individual features constantly manifest themselves in various kinds of activities and are the basis for individual styles of different types of people activities.

Firstly, stylistic features of self-regulation are determined as individual typical differences of processes that realize the main components of self-regulation system (goals planning, modeling of significant conditions, and programming of actions and estimation of results). Secondly, stylistic features that characterize the function of all components of self-regulation system are at the same time personal traits (e.g. independence, flexibility, and resourcefulness). Thus, we study first of all the operational aspects of self-regulating processes, abstracting from their contents. That allows us to exercise a uniform approach and to compare individual peculiarities of the main regulatory processes in the varied types of activity, regardless of their external specifics, and to identify stylistic peculiarities of self-regulation.

In order to study and diagnose the described features the following questionnaire methods have been developed and standardized: Style Features of Behavioral Self-Regulation, Sportsman's Self-Regulation in Preparing to a Contest, Self-Regulation in Election Campaign of a Deputy, Individual Self-Regulation of Students.

The statements of the questionnaires were grouped into a number of scales, which assess development of typical individual peculiarities of regulatory processes. The results of testing make it possible to assess the individual level of development of self-regulation, which indicates ability to achieve the set goal.

Also, we can construct individual profiles of self-regulation reflecting the level of development of stylistic features of the main regulatory processes and personal regulatory traits [1], [2].

We described the individual differences of self-regulation with structural and level characteristics of regulatory system. The level characteristics reflect the degree of development of individual components and the system as a whole. The structural characteristics reflect specific features of a regulatory profile of self-regulation. According to these characteristics, harmonious and accentuated self-regulation styles can be distinguished.

Subjects with the harmonious style have all indicators of regulation developed to approximately the same extent. Such styles of self-regulation are formed when professional activity sets higher demands on the development of self-regulation. For example, we have diagnosed harmonious styles of self-regulation among sportsmen of highest professional category.

Later it was proved that high harmonious styles of self-regulation are typical for individuals with well-developed subject's traits like responsibility, self-confidence and persistence. We have evidence that individuals with low self-regulation profile have less opportunity for learning new professions and less effectiveness in their activities.

Of course these results do not mean that effective activity could be achieved only by individuals with high harmonious styles of self-regulation.

If the self-regulation profile is accentuated, the formation of effective or ineffective self-regulation style depends not only on the level of self-regulation development, but also on the correspondence of specific regulatory characteristics of activity to individual regulation profile structure, and the emergence in the process of style formation of compensatory relations between strong and weak aspects of self-regulation.

2. Studies of individual differences of conscious self-regulation and personality

For the last 20 years we have consistently advanced the thesis that personality structures of different levels have an influence on what goals people set and how they set them; they also modulate in a specific way the individual profile.

In fact we are speaking of creating a new field of the psychology of individual differences – that of individual differences in self-regulation of voluntary activity. Traditionally stable differences in human behavior are described by psychologists through the concept of traits and types of temperament and intelligence, and of personality. The nature of these differences is viewed usually through the prism of genetic and environmental factors, and is associated with human constitution, physiology and psychophysiology. The investigation of individual differences in conscious self-regulation allows us to take a new look on many problems within psychology of individual differences. Firstly, there is the influence of subject's activity on manifestations of individual temperament and character. The methodology and methods that we have developed make it possible to substantiate the following statement, both from the theoretical and empirical points of view. The temperament

and character certainly set some biologically determined individual characteristics of behavior as well as of its self-regulation. At the same time subject's own activity, whose main mechanism is conscious self-regulation, influences temperament and character manifestations, can widen the norm of reaction, and allows the person to introduce considerable changes into the productive aspects of his/her activity.

To support this statement we investigated the regulatory basis of personality accentuations of character (according to K. Leonhard's classification). For each typological group we succeeded in identifying specific profiles and describing the corresponding effective styles in education activity in psychological characteristics of students.

In our latest study we attempted to test the linkages between personality variables and individual features of self-regulation [1], [2]. Central place in our project took the personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism (as assessed by H. Eysenck questionnaire). We sought to widen these concepts from the point of view of typical structures of individual characteristics of self-regulation. In this study the regulatory basis of extraversion and neuroticism was identified. The research was conducted on 856 Russian high school students aged from 17 to 21. The methods included The Self-Regulation Profile Questionnaire - SRQM, [5] and Russian version of Eysenck Personality Questionnaire [6].

Figure 1 presented seven typical self-regulation profiles of different structure in typological groups of extraverts, introverts, the emotionally-stable, and the emotionally unstable were identified. In fact, typical self-regulation profiles reflect the main tendencies in self-regulation of voluntary activity, which are characteristic for extraversion and neuroticism. This fact suggests the existence of common invariant regulatory basis for these temperamental dimensions of personality

Another study was aimed at a comparison of Big 5 personality dimensions and the structure of individual self-regulation. Typical self-regulation profiles of the subjects with extreme scores of extraversion and neuroticism were identified. It was shown that conscientiousness (Big 5) correlated highly with the general level of conscious self-regulation (SRQM). These data suggest a conceptual and instrumental proximity of these concepts.

In these two studies, we revealed a very important fact that typical profiles can change at various levels of conscious self-regulation development. For a highly developed self-regulation system, the profiles are characterized by highly developed and closely interconnected main components of self-regulation structure, such as harmonious self-regulation style, which allows one to compensate the influence of personality characteristics and traits hindering successful goal achievement [1].

In typical self-regulation profiles, among the weak links in self-regulation system there are those, which do not easily lend themselves to compensation through a highly developed general self-regulation level and which are the most stable stylistic self-regulation aspects, thus representing limitations for the effective self-regulation formation.

For extraverts and stables this weak regulation aspect is planning. For introverts the weak link is modeling of significant conditions, for the emotionally unstable the weak link is result evaluation.

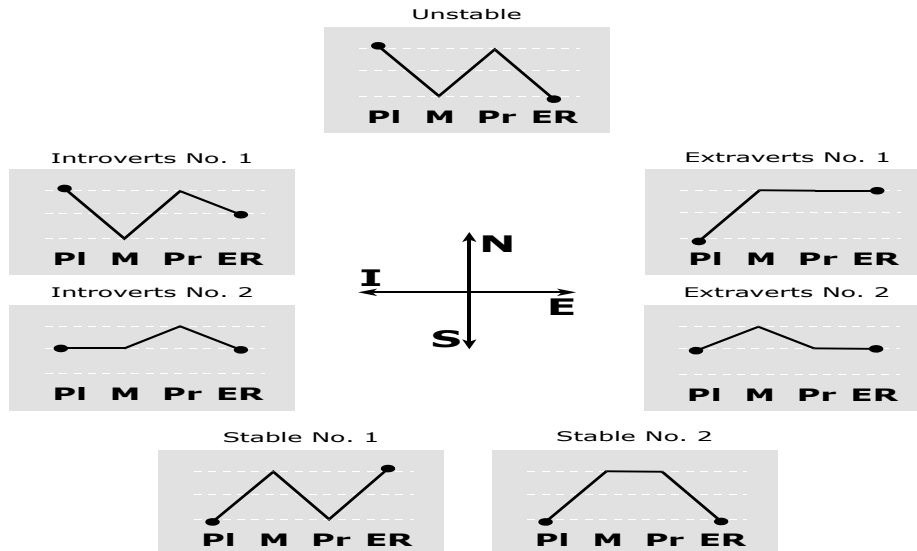


Fig.1. Typical profiles of Self-regulation for Extraverts and Introverts (PI -goals planning, M - modeling of significant conditions, Pr - programming of actions and ER - estimation of results)

On the other hand, among the strong regulation traits are those that are resistant to the decrease in the level of conscious self-regulation. In individuals with a high level of neuroticism and in introverts, the regulation aspects of planning and programming can retain functional maturity even at a low level of conscious self-regulation, for extraverts and stables such trait is modeling.

It has also been shown that higher levels of conscious processing in self-regulation can modulate the effects of personality dispositions, balancing the extreme manifestations of underlying temperamental tendencies. The results of the investigation of self-regulation individual differences as the bases of temperament, character and self-conscience as well as its manifestation in achievement of professional and life goals were summarized in the monograph *Self-regulation and human individuality* [7].

3. General discussion

To sum up our research on personality characteristics of individual aspects of self-regulation we can conclude that conscious self-regulation system has its projections on various levels of individuality. Personality-temperamental dispositions can be described by individually-specific profiles of self-regulation. The high level of conscious self-regulation gives better opportunities for voluntary behavior regulation and control. The low level of conscious self-regulation is an evidence of the more spontaneous and impulsive individual activity. Moreover, conscious self-regulation is executed through the complex multilevel system of cognitive and personality recourses of individuality. System of conscious self-regulation integrates dynamic and substantial aspects of individuality, conscious and unconscious structures for individual goal planning and goal achievement in human life span.

The subject's activity in setting and achieving goals is mediated by the integrated system of individual regulation, which functions as a tool for integrating and connecting the dynamic and content aspects of personality, its conscious and unconscious structures for goal setting and goal attainment.

In fact we are speaking of creating a new field of the psychology of individual differences – that of individual differences in self-regulation of voluntary activity. Traditionally, differences in human behaviour are described by psychologists through the concept of traits and types of temperament, intelligence and personality. Usually, the nature of these differences is studied through the prism of genetic and environmental factors, and is associated with human constitution, physiology and psychophysiology. The investigation of individual

differences in conscious self-regulation allows us to take a new look on many problems within psychology of individual differences. Firstly, there is the influence of subject's activity on manifestations of individual temperament and character. The temperament and character certainly set some biologically determined individual characteristics of behaviour as well as of self-regulation. At the same time human activity, which main mechanism is conscious self-regulation, influences temperament and character manifestations, allows the person to increase the diversity of behaviour and to introduce considerable changes into the productive aspects of his own activity. The results of self-regulation study were applied to increase effectiveness of professional activity such as politics, athletes, lifesavers and learning activity such as high school and college students.

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